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GEOG 295.01: Peoples and Cultures of Central and Southwest Asia

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Recommended Citation

Halvorson, Sarah J.; Gritzner, Jeffrey Allman; and O'Donnell, Dennis, "GEOG 295.01: Peoples and Cultures of Central and Southwest Asia" (2002). *Syllabi*. 3194.

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Geography/History/Asian Studies 295
PEOPLES AND CULTURES OF CENTRAL & SOUTHWEST ASIA
Fall Semester 2002
Wednesday 6:10-9:00p.m., SS 344

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is an introduction to the peoples and cultures of Central and Southwest Asia. The broad theme of the “Silk Road” (also referred to as the Silk Route) will be used to frame our exploration and analysis of this fascinating and complex region. The ancient 4,000-mile long Silk Road actually represents a number of significant routes that served to connect China with the western corners of Asia, thereby carrying goods (e.g., silk, wools, gold, and silver) and ideas (e.g., Buddhism, Islam, scientific discovery, and urban planning concepts) through time and space. Similar cultural, political, economic, and philosophical exchanges and interactions also took place along north-south terrestrial and maritime coordinates. Over the course of the semester we will seek to build a conceptual “map” of the Silk Roads in both historical and contemporary contexts that relies on an understanding of the historical, environmental, and geopolitical settings that have shaped the current character and geography of the region.

During the semester, we will address a wide range of topics that have influenced or mediated past and present lives and realities in the region of the Silk Roads. Some of the topics include: the dynamic physical geography of Inner Asia and its relevance for people historically and presently; ancient cultures and civilizations; the development and diffusion of science and technology; geopolitical and state-level policy concerns; urban and rural livelihoods and

economies in transition; issues concerning refugees and force movement; the human devastation and economic impacts of drug trafficking; the status of women and children; questions of identity and nationalism; and the serious environmental problems in the region. In the last third of the semester we will have the opportunity to deepen our focus on a variety of critical water-related issues in the Aral Sea and Caspian Basin watersheds. In recent years, attention to water problems in this region has grown as scientific understanding of the linkages between this vital resource and ecological and human health has improved.

TEXTS AND RESOURCES

Books

The following books are required and have been ordered for the class. You are expected to read them in their entirety.

- Kobori, Iwao and Glantz, Michael (editors). 1998. *Central Eurasian Water Crisis: Caspian, Aral, and Dead Seas* (Water Resources Management and Policy Series). Tokyo: United Nations Press. [ISBN: 9280809253]
- Thubron, Colin. 2000. *The Lost Heart of Asia*. Harper Perennial. [ISBN: 0060926562]
- Whitfield, Susan. 2001. *Life Along the Silk Road*. Berkeley: University of California Press. [ISBN: 0520232143]

Readings on Reserve

All of the following readings are on reserve in the Mansfield Library and available on-line via E-Res. These are indicated by [R] in the course schedule.

- Allen, Thomas. 1996. "Xinjiang," *National Geographic*, Vol. 189, No.3, pp. 2-43.
- Allen, Thomas. 1996. "The Silk Road's Lost World," *National Geographic*, Vol. 189, No.3, pp. 44-51.
- Gore, Rick. 2002. "The First Pioneer?" National Geographic Research and Exploration New Find Article, *National Geographic*, Vol. 202, No. 2.
- Marston, Sallie A., Knox, Paul L. and Liverman, Diana M. 2002. "Chapter 4: The Russian Federation, Central Asia, and the Transcaucasus," *World Regions in Global Context: Peoples, Places and Environments*, Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, pp. 153-199.

Readings on the Web

In addition to the books, there will be some short required readings on selected web sites. Specific information regarding these readings will be announced in class.

COURSE POLICIES AND ASSESSMENT

Map Quiz

In order to create a basic level of geographical literacy about Central and Southwest Asia at the outset of this course, you will be required to take an in-class Map Quiz (September 18). The Map Quiz will be based on a list of key places and features that will be provided to you in class.

Exams

There will be three in-class exams: two during the semester and one final exam. Questions will involve multiple choice, matching, short-answer definitions, and short and long essays based on the readings and lectures. The essay questions will test your ability to analytically deal with some of the broad issues and themes of the course and to support your arguments with reference to specific evidence provided by course material.

Journal

The goal of the journal is to develop and document your own experiences and interactions, albeit distant as they may seem from Missoula, with Central and Southwest Asia. The journal should include your weekly summaries of news briefs, responses and critiques of films and lectures, responses to the assigned readings, and documentation (written, artistic, photographic) of any other out-of-class engagements you might have with the region. Weekly contributions should be at least 2-3 written pages. The journal will be collected two times during the semester, October 16 and December 4.

Food, Science and Ecology Research Project

You will be expected to apply your creativity and resourcefulness to create a food/dish to share with the class during our last meeting on December 11. This assignment will provide you with the opportunity to research various food traditions and to build a deeper understanding of culture, ecology, economics, indigenous dietary and health sciences, and agricultural systems within the broad context of social change in Central and Southwest Asia. The activity entails working with two or three other students to prepare a type of food to share with your colleagues. The bulk of your grade will be based on a research paper (5-8 pages typed) that situates the food/dish in a historical, ecological, and economic context and conveys its cultural relevance of for past and/or present communities along the Silk Road. The paper should include a bibliography of all sources consulted (a minimum of 5 references), and must indicate quotations and citations using appropriate punctuation and annotation.

Grading Summary:

Map Quiz	25 points (5%)
Journal	150 points (30%)
3 Examinations (2 @ 50 points; 1 @ 100 points)	200 points (40%)
Food, Science, and Ecology Project	125 points (25%)
Final Grade	500 possible points (100%)

Your grade will be calculated on a straight percentage basis: 90% and above = A; 80%-89% = B; 70%-79% = C; 60-69% = D; and 59% and below = F.

COURSE OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

Upon completion of this course, it is hoped that students will have acquired:

1. An understanding of the complexity and diversity of cultural, economic, political, and environmental issues in contemporary Central and Southwest Asia, the innovative nature of livelihood strategies, and the problems faced by vulnerable social groups in the region;
2. A grounding in social science and humanities scholarship and debate on issues in the region, including a basic conceptual “map” of the Silk Roads which relies on an appreciation of the historical, cultural, environmental and geopolitical conditions that have produced particular economic, social, and political relations in the region, as mediated through religion, ethnicity, class, gender, etc.;
3. Skills in: geographic literacy, written expression and analysis, verbal expression and analysis, researching and presenting a group research project, and critical thinking.

SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS, READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS

Part I. The What, Where, Why and How of the Silk Roads

Week 1 (September 4)

Introduction to the class and the Silk Roads

Week 2 (September 11)

Overview of Environments and Peoples

Lecturer: Dr. Jeffrey Gritzner

* *Readings*: Marston et al., pp. 153-199 [R]

Week 3 (September 18)

Ancient Cultures and Civilizations

Lecturer: Dr. Ardeshir Kia

* *Readings*: “The Silk Road’s Lost World” [R] and “The First Pioneer?” [R]; Whitfield’s *Life Along the Silk Road*, pp. 1-75

* **Map Quiz**

Week 4 (September 25)

Interactions between East and West: Science, Technology, and Discovery

Lecturer: Dr. Jeffrey Gritzner

* *Readings:* Whitfield's *Life Along the Silk Road*, pp. 76-154

Week 5 (October 2)

The Rise of Islam

Lecturer: Dr. Mehrdad Kia

* *Readings:* Whitfield's *Life Along the Silk Road*, pp. 155-225

* **EXAM I**

Part II. New Challenges on Old Roads

Week 6 (October 9)

Rural Livelihoods and Social Change: A Case Study of Nomads and Rangeland Management in Mongolia and Western China

Lecturer: Dr. Donald Bedunah

* *Readings:* "Xinjiang" [R]

Week 7 (October 16)

Economies in Transition I

Lecturer: Dr. Dennis O'Donnell

* *Readings:* *Lost Heart of Asia*

* **Journal Due**

Week 8 (October 23)

Economies in Transition II

Lecturer: Dr. Dennis O'Donnell

* *Readings:* *Lost Heart of Asia*

Week 9 (October 30)

Settlements and Cities

Lecturer: Dr. S.J. Halvorson

Film: "The Muslim Town: Urban Life under the Caliphate"

* *Readings:* *Lost Heart of Asia*

Week 10 (November 6)

Montana-Silk Road Linkages: Science, Scholarship, and Civic Engagement
Lecturer: Ganaa Wingard, Wildlife Biology Doctoral candidate

* *Readings: Lost Heart of Asia*

* **EXAM II**

Part III. Regional Environmental Change: Water

Week 11 (November 13)

Water in Crisis I

* *Readings: Central Eurasian Water Crisis*, pp. 1-88

Week 12 (November 20)

Water in Crisis II

* *Readings: Central Eurasian Water Crisis*, pp. 91-122; IUCN Newsletter on the Caspian Sea

Week 13 (November 27)

No Class – Thanksgiving Break

Week 14 (December 4)

Water in Crisis III: Future Prospects?

* *Readings: Central Eurasian Water Crisis*, pp. 125-195

* **Journal Due**

Part IV. Course Wrap-Up

Week 15 (December 11)

Bazaar Tastes: Food Traditions, Dietary Change, Culture and Ecology
Slides: Mountain Food and Farming Systems in the Karakoram (Dr. S.J. Halvorson)

* *Readings: Handouts*

* **Food, Science, and Ecology Research Project Due**

Week 16 (December 18)

* **FINAL EXAM**